



*DPI VISTA Project*  
*Promising Partnership Practices*  
*2009-2010*



**Site:** *Milwaukee Public Schools, Central Office*

**Partnership Practice:** *Parent Professional Development Nights*

At Parent Professional Development Sessions we pass out literature and handouts we've created for parents to take home and use. Parents were coming to us with specific questions on the topics and questions on where to find other resources. The Parent Professional Development Sessions (PPDS) were publicized via email, mail, phone and school fliers. Then at the PPDS we would either put the information into packets or display them on the front table for parents to pick up. Each Parent Professional Development Session had a topic - we picked resources and information we believe would be pertinent to families. We researched the information trying to put together fact/advice sheets for parents and trying to find fun activities for children. For our math night we found fun activities that parents and children could engage in together and compiled them into one document. For our literacy night we compiled tips for parents and provided them with information about the public library and allowed them to pick out books that had been donated. For parent and teacher communication we compiled a sheet on ways of communicating and on the different parent groups they could join to get their voices heard. And for Health and Nutrition we ordered lots of literature from the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Agriculture; we had fun coloring sheets and activity/food ideas for the children and lots of good information for the parents (sources to get calcium from besides milk).

**VISTAs:** *Casey Burns, Angela Rumsey*

**Site:** *Fond du Lac Public Library*

**Partnership Practice:** *Job Smart University Classes*

One of our most successful practices has been Job Smart U (JSU). JSU is a series of workshops and classes designed to assist people to gain the skills they need to be successful in their job search. These classes occur twice monthly on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursdays of the month. Classes have included topics such as resumes, interviewing, online job searching, effective listening, job searching for older workers, and overcoming challenging work histories. All classes occur at the library and are typically held in the large meeting room. Special classes such as the mock interview sessions and online job search class were hands-on so they were held in conference rooms and the Opportunity Center computer lab respectively. The goal of this practice is to ensure that people have the tools they need to be successful in this difficult job market. So many people, for example, come into the Opportunity Center to complete online applications and they do not even have a resume completed or even know what a cover letter is. Job Smart U courses hopefully can help people fill in the gaps in their job search by showing them how to develop an effective resume/cover letter, search for the appropriate jobs, and successfully interview for a position once they get in the door. This directly supports economic recovery goals because the first step to achieving economic stability is to have an incoming flow of money. Community members serve as Job Smart U attendees and as volunteer instructors. We lean on library staff and community partners for workshop instructor ideas. Additionally, the Community Information Coordinator helps us out with promotion.

**VISTAs:** *Sara Byrnes, Josh Cowles*

**Site:** *WI Department of Public Instruction*

**Partnership Practice:** *Milwaukee AmeriCorps Service Summit*

The idea for the Milwaukee AmeriCorps Service Summit came from a series of conversations among a few WI AmeriCorps Representative Council (WIARC) members last year. WIARC is a leadership, collaborative unit of various AmeriCorps program representatives. We loved the opportunity to meet one another and learn about our programs; but we thought it was a shame that this collaboration was not more widespread among members and programs in the Milwaukee area. In January a collaborative, group of various AmeriCorps affiliations worked together to plan a summit where all Milwaukee-area AmeriCorps members could come together to network with one another and to discuss ways to identify and fight oppression. Our collaborative group decided that since projects and members would already be taking time to come together on Martin Luther King, Jr. day, the following day might be a great time to connect with one another to reflect on the big picture of how AmeriCorps is impacting Milwaukee city-wide. Our primary goal was to bring various AmeriCorps programs and members from Milwaukee together to build a Milwaukee-wide network. Many service members from the area (and their programs) are not even aware of all the AmeriCorps initiatives that exist in the city. Rather than existing separately, we hoped that bringing people and programs together would yield more collaborative efforts and ultimately create more of a Milwaukee AmeriCorps community. We also wanted to make sure that the event was structured in a way to maximize networking and big-picture reflection on members' and programs' AmeriCorps service projects. Using resources from our collaborative planning unit, we were able to put together an agenda that included community/program asset-mapping, which helped us realize how our programs overlapped in an intentional way. In addition to this networking element, our collaborative planning committee also thought it would be a great idea to include a training/reflection element that could bring us together to reflect upon some of the larger issues all of us face in our positions in dealing with institutionalized oppression.

**VISTA:** *Pen Bruskin*

**Site:** *Nuestro Mundo Community School - Madison Metropolitan School District*

**Partnership Practice:** *Partnering Up to Serve the Community*

The Casa de San Martín Service Project at Nuestro Mundo Community School began as an idea to have students become more engaged in their community by tying what they learn in the classroom about social inequality to the local reality of poverty and the methods of relieving it. In 2007, first grade teacher Sarah Meier was interested in tying direct community service to the social justice components of the curriculum. She came up with the idea to send all of the first grade students of the dual-language immersion charter school to the Catholic Multicultural Center's St. Martin House to help prepare and serve a meal for the homeless. Meier couldn't do this alone however. It took many 1<sup>st</sup> grade parents to jump on-board with the project. Together, parents, staff and students held a food drive to stock the food pantry so that there would be enough food for the students to use to cook meals for the homeless. The students also made colorful placemats, signs, and posters to decorate the dining area, and practiced some songs to sing for their guests. In the years that followed, the Casa de San Martín Project has grown to be school-wide. Every grade level, with the exception of kindergarten, now participates in this enriching service-learning event with as many as 30 parent volunteers participate each year in organizing, planning and facilitating it.

**VISTA:** *Ellen Carpenter*

**Site:** *Education Outreach and Partnerships – UW Madison*

**Partnership Practice:** *Science on Wheels*

Precollege Programs has combined forces with WCATY (Wisconsin Center for Academically Talented Youth) to bring online learning together with outdoor adventure for low income students. The program began in March with an online course entitled, “Geniuses, Villains, and Idols.” With a focus on science, this is the student’s first introduction to setting positive academic goals; students learn about brilliant scientists who used their intelligence for evil purposes and with cruel intentions. At the three face-to-face meetings, the summer facilitators begin the process of building group cohesion and positive personal values. Those who successfully complete this online challenge have the option to participate in the summer program, which is a grant-sponsored initiative. As the online course comes to a close, the students will have completed their final project. The project will be a detailed plan for a service-learning project of the students’ choice. The project must also be focused on a topic related to the environment, specifically the environment within their communities. Each student must put their plan to action, complete their project, and evaluate the initiative between the dates of June 15 and August 1st.

For the last portion of the program, students will head to the UW-Madison campus to begin our 6-day experiential science program. The students will spend three days on campus, where we will meet up with experts in various fields of science for two-hour hands-on learning sessions. During the time when the students are not in a session, facilitators will be leading them through numerous teambuilding and personal goal-setting initiatives. The students will then travel to Kettle Moraine State Park and continue to engage in a variety of academic and leadership experiences, all by means of camping and exploring the natural environment on bicycles.

**VISTA:** *Abby Churchill*

**Site:** *West Milwaukee Intermediate School*

**Partnership Practice:** *Good Citizenship Bingo*

Students at West Milwaukee Intermediate School were challenged to complete Good Citizenship Bingo cards in order to be entered in a raffle to win prizes donated by local businesses. The students had one month to engage in the positive community behaviors on the bingo cards. When they did something on the card, an adult would initial the box and put the date on it. Completed cards were turned into first period teachers. For every five students who got bingo, classes would earn a positive play sticker for their classroom’s Coat of Arms. Every student who filled their entire card would earn a positive play sticker for his or her classroom’s Coat of Arms. Good citizenship behaviors in the bingo boxes included standing up for someone being bullied, teaching someone a new skill, writing a thank you card, and spending time with an elderly person. The goal of the activity was to encourage positive, respectful behavior by students at school and in the community.

**VISTA:** *Stephanie Dorman*

**Site:** *Vaughn Public Library*

**Partnership Practice:** *Community Resource Database*

The primary purpose of the database was to collect the information and verify it for accuracy for future reference by community members. The databases built based upon this information will be available 24/7 from the Vaughn Public Library website and will serve to connect hundreds of

local resources in one place. Additionally, the goal is to increase awareness of the services available to the unemployed and underemployed individuals in the Ashland, by providing access to contact information for these organizations. I used several styles of gathering information for my community wide resource data base: Phone interviews, website research, flyer information, and visiting with the organization at their location. I also helped complete a grant application to the Ashland Foundation in April 2010, to obtain monies to produce magnets with the links to the social service and volunteer databases accessible from the Vaughn Public Library website. Once produced, these magnets will be distributed at the social service agencies and organizations in the community, as well as the library. My hope is that the community members will make a connection to the appropriate service or organization when they need assistance. The library staff can also utilize the information from the library website to provide information referrals to patrons.

**VISTA:** *Colleen Douglass*

**Site:** *Maple Tree Elementary*

**Partnership Practice:** *Black History Poster Contest*

This was a school-wide voluntary contest for families to enter. They submitted their entry forms at the beginning of February and had two and a half weeks to work on their projects before the deadline. Families who entered the contest were provided with a poster board on which they could create a project about a famous person or event in the civil rights movement. The winners of first through third place were announced during the school's Black History Program and given prizes. The idea for this project was presented to the Action Team by the VISTA working with the school. We did not want to plan another event at the school because the program had already been scheduled for that month, so we needed a way to work with the pre-scheduled event.

The roles of parents and students were to take the initiative to sign-up for the contest, research the civil rights movement, create their projects, and submit them to the school's VISTA by the posted deadline. The role of teachers was to distribute the flyers about the contest that were provided by the Action Team to their students. Community members provided monetary and in-kind donations that allowed the Action Team to provide families with poster boards and prizes for winners of the contest. Administrators, along with the teachers and community members on the Action Team were given the responsibility of judging the projects that were submitted for the contest. The specific goal of this practice was to give the school's families a chance to learn about the civil rights movement together. It supports the school improvement goal of parent involvement in academics.

**VISTA:** *Sarah Glassman*

**Site:** *Madison Public Library*

**Partnership Practice:** *Computer and Job Assistance Programs*

In June 2009, Central Library began offering 1-on-1 **job** help assistance one day a week. We used volunteers from the Madison Senior Center to work at these events along with paid doctoral students from the UW-Madison Writing Center's Community Writing Assistance program. As the summer went on, it became apparent that many of the people we were helping were in need of learning basic computer skills as much as they were in need of finding a job. We began advertising the service as **computer and job** assistance and popularity continued to increase. In

late October we added a second session. At this point, the Senior Center's renovations had ended and the volunteers had moved on, so after heavy research, the library purchased Volgistics volunteer management service and utilized this to improve our volunteer recruitment and increase our ability to track volunteer hours. We were able to attract a number of volunteers with our new online forms and advertisements and were fully staffed into the winter. In January, we found out we had received ~\$15k from LSTA which was to be used on A) continuing to pay CWA instructors B) the purchase of laptop computers for mobile labs C) circulation items and D) paying for larger, seminar style presentations. This same month, we opened a permanent room at Central library which was to be used exclusively for 1-on-1 help. In the grant, we had named specific branch locations where we were planning to expand the service. Along the way, we have cultivated relationships with a variety of job help service providers so that they know they can refer people to us if they work with someone who has higher needs than they can manage and so that we can refer folks to services that better fit their specialized areas of need. Eventually, we'd like groups who specialize in job assistance to consider the library and outpost and extension site of their service so we do not need to continue using grant funds to pay for and staff these help sessions on our own.

**VISTA:** *Jim Handorf*

**Site:** *Lakeland Family Resource Center*

**Partnership Practice:** *Dad and Me Science and Supper Night*

What do you get when you add 4 Dads, 4 daughters and a whole lot of flour? A really cool exploding volcano! That was one of the activities that were featured at the Dad and Me Science and Supper Night sponsored by the Green Bay Packer Grant foundation and Lakeland Family Resource Center on May 4<sup>th</sup> held at Northwood School. The families were treated to a sloppy joe dinner complete with chocolate chip bars. Sara Hubin, an AmeriCorps VISTA from the center wanted to create a fun night for dads and their kids to interact and thought using a science theme would make for a very interesting evening. First on the agenda for the night was Wilma Johnson from UW-Extension demonstrating their Germ light she explained about the importance of thoroughly washing your hands before a meal and used the light as a way of showing each person just how well they had washed? Everyone did a really great job of getting rid of their germs before they had dinner. Once dinner was finished the dads and daughters paired up to get instructions on how to make their Volcanoes. First off they filled the bottles almost all the way with water and red food coloring. Then they were given flour, salt, oil, and water to mix together to form the dough that went around the bottle to create the volcano shape. After they added some liquid detergent and baking soda they were ready to pour in the vinegar and take a step back to watch what they created! It was really cool to see the dads and daughters reactions to the explosion of red foam! After a thorough clean-up of the volcanoes they had a chance to make Wave bottles using oil, water and food coloring. This activity wasn't nearly as messy as the Volcano but they had just as much fun making them.

**VISTA:** *Sara Hubin*

**Site:** *Racine Public Library*

**Partnership Practice:** *National Library Week Open House*

For National Library Week the Racine Public Library held an open house to invite families and individuals into the library. The goal was to provide a comfortable and open setting to allow community members to explore the library and get familiar with it without feeling intimidated. We also wanted to highlight some of the resources that are available at the library such as job help and community organization information. Earlier on, library staff, patrons and community members had discussed how a lot of community members might feel intimidated by visiting the library, especially if they have never been here. The open house was a way to get patrons into the library and made exploring it fun with a scavenger hunt. Also, we held an organization fair with many of our community partners to highlight their activities to patrons and to promote the library's relationships with them. The free event featured a community partnership fair with organizations such as the Volunteer Center of Racine, United Way, Nami and SafeHaven. The event also offered behind the scene library tours, a grand prize scavenger hunt, children's crafts and other family activities. Local authors, poets and musicians also participated offering the community entertainment. The scavenger hunt highlighted areas of the library that are often overlooked and brought many people to the organization fair. The grand prize was a free night at the Marriot in Racine, which was graciously donated to us.

**VISTA:** *Lizzy Lowrey*

**Site:** *School District of Rhinelander*

**Partnership Practice:** *America Reads Program*

The school District of Rhinelander partnered with Nicolet Area Technical College this past March to bring two paid tutors into Central Intermediate School to help tutor students for a combined total of 30 hours a week. These tutors received four hours of training at Nicolet College before being put into the school. They also had a follow up training of one hour per month after they had been tutoring for approximately two months. The America Reads program uses Federal Work Study students and volunteers from local Colleges and Universities across the Country to bring them into elementary and middle schools across the United States to tutor struggling readers. Here in Rhinelander Wisconsin, the School District of Rhinelander recently joined the hundreds of other school districts across the country to bring young college tutors and role models into the schools. The specific goal of this practice is to assist in the increase of reading levels amongst targeted students within the school. There is a school improvement goal focused on reading. Targeted students are tracked throughout the building and are constantly looked at for signs of improvement. Teachers meet monthly to discuss targeted students progress.

**VISTA:** *Anna Morgen*

**Site:** *Wausau School District (WSD)*

**Partnership Practice:** *Family University Network (F.U.N.)*

The Wausau School District developed and implemented a new program, Family University Network (F.U.N.), to provide family learning opportunities throughout the district. The goals of Family University Network are to expand and enrich quality family educational programming in the Wausau School District (WSD), and to create opportunities to equip WSD parents to participate in their child's

learning, both at school and in the home. Family University Network offers parents the opportunity to expand their knowledge in a way the WSD has not offered before with the conference-style event. An Action Team for Partnerships was created for F.U.N. to decide in which ways to conduct district-wide family education opportunities. For the first event, the Action Team decided on the theme “Castle Quest” based on the medieval settings of the guest author’s stories. All WSD elementary school and pre-K program families were invited to attend the event. Multiple parent workshops were provided all in one place for convenience, as well as many activities for the children to participate in. Parents were able to choose which workshops they attended, giving them the opportunity to gain knowledge in an area that was of interest to them. The workshops offered were; child development, healthy lifestyle choices, homework strategies, and coping with stress. Children rotated through different activities, staying with the same group led by a counselor, while parents attended the workshops. Activities included swimming in the pool, playing in the gym, reading with therapy dogs, storytelling, and making a craft. Breakfast and lunch were provided for participants and volunteers, and a Community Showcase during breakfast allowed organizations in the community to have information for families at the event. There was also a local author who told stories to all of the parents and children and a family art activity at the end of the event day that brought parents and children back together.

**VISTA:** *Kristine Nadolski*

**Site:** *Indian Community School*

**Partnership Practice:** *ICS Summer Fun Bag*

For the past few years, ICS has been sending a bag home with every child including a book and word games for the students to enjoy over the holiday break. Originally, when the practice began, the bags were sent home for the holiday break because the majority of our students come from low-income homes and the ATP wanted to make sure that students had a “present” from the school that was both educational and fun. This year, the ATP decided to send home something with the students at the end of the year instead. The ATP is getting a drawstring bag for every student that will include a Frisbee, a water bottle, at least one book, and word games for the students to keep busy with over the summer. The goal of this practice is to provide our students with activities to help keep them active, both physically and academically during the summer months. Our school does not provide any summer opportunities for the students through summer school or a day-camp, so this is an excellent way to continue literacy development while they are at home for the summer. The ATP worked with the school’s Reading Specialist to buy books and pick out age-appropriate books for students at every grade level. The packs were distributed to the students during the last week of school in the classrooms.

**VISTA:** *Hannah Schulz*

**Site:** *Wausau Early Childhood Program*

**Partnership Practice:** *Daddy and Me Wii Night*

The idea for having a Wii night was suggested by a staff member for a Parent’s Night Out event (where we provide childcare and let the parents enjoy a special event such as cooking or dancing). Instead we decided to pair the Wii idea with the fatherhood parenting class. We wanted to find a way to involve father figures more, especially in parenting classes. So the thought for a fathers-only event came up as a possibility for increasing attendees to parenting



classes. Child activities and supervision was provided while a local counselor led the discussion on the importance of being an involved father for the first 30 minutes after arrival. The children and fathers then played in the gym on the Wii equipment for about 45 minutes. This evening event for father figures and their children was possible through collaboration with a community organization. A local area counselor provided a fatherhood discussion that was followed by Wii game time. Equipment was also donated by a community business. Partnering with community groups allowed for this activity to happen at a low cost and be a benefit to our school families. Our goal was to partner with community groups to provide a parenting session for father figures as well as an enjoyable bonding time with their children. This successful event allowed us to partner with the community, encourage and help father figures in their roles and be a fun growing activity for our students. Fathers also attended that had never attended previous events, so it was a successful partnership practice.

**VISTA:** *Sylvia Sedrak*

**Site:** *SUPAR (School for Urban Planning and Architecture)*

**Partnership Practice:** *Home Visiting Program*

Students travel to attend the School for Urban Planning and Architecture (SUPAR), a public charter high school, from all over Milwaukee. For most, this involves an over-an-hour public bus ride, replete with transfers. This same commute adversely affects parent participation in school events. However, the Parent Engagement and Leadership Team –an offshoot of the school’s governance board – still wanted to keep the parents engaged *with* the school. This idea for the home visiting program came about as the Parent Engagement and Leadership Team brainstormed about taking an idea usually used associated with younger students and applying it to their high school population. The specific goal of this practice was to increase parent engagement with the school in order to bring parents into the school so they could be involved with our governance council and ATP. In our governance board by-laws, it states that the board should be comprised of 51% parents so that decision-making is truly shared. The four members of the team: the founder of the school, an advisor, an AmeriCorps\*VISTA member, and a paraprofessional met at SUPAR to carpool to families’ homes. “We’re bringing SUPAR to you!” the founder would brightly proclaim as the Team entered the families’ houses. Though it was previously stated that the visit wasn’t prompted because the child was in trouble, some looked nervous. We were prepared to meet in a neutral location if parents didn’t want us in their homes, but all were welcoming. Parents asked us many questions – we were on their turf after all– illustrating one difference between home visits and parent-teacher conferences. Questions ranged from the basics of the project-based learning structure of the school, to grades, and how parents can monitor and support their student’s progress at home. It was fantastic to hear parents ask how they could be involved with learning at home. In all visits, the students seemed to sit up a little straighter. Having two of their “spheres of influence” collide made them drop any guises they may wear at school or home. We talked about the student’s strengths and how families can support this at home.

**VISTA:** *Cara Slingerland*

**Site:** *Aldo Leopold Elementary School – Madison Metropolitan School District*

**Partnership Practice:** *Walking School Bus*

Becky Smith helped establish a Walking School Bus program to engage parent, community volunteers and help address the school's wellness goal. In particular, The Walking School Bus Program provides a safe way for students to get to school on time, active, alert, and ready to learn. Leopold Elementary also hopes that this program will decrease traffic congestion around the school and build community within the neighborhoods. This idea came as a solution to Aldo Leopold's struggles with student tardiness this year. Students arrive late for various reasons, but one of those reasons includes a perception that neighborhoods are not safe for students to walk alone. Becky Smith and the school staff/partners are actively working to break down some of these barriers as they implement the program. The Walking School Bus is simply a group of students that walk to school together accompanied by adult volunteers. It is currently running Tuesday and Thursday mornings on three different routes near the school. Each route takes about 20 – 25 minutes from the starting point to arrival at school. It arrives in time for students who eat breakfast at school to have enough time to eat. There are a number of adult volunteers – school staff and parents – who lead the routes. Other parents sometimes join the group along the way too. The group carries student decorated signs, sometimes play drums or sing songs together and generally have a nice time together.

**VISTA:** *Becky Smith*

**Site:** *UW Green-Bay/Green Bay School District*

**Partnership Practice:** *Hmong Education Family Night*

Our team implemented this practice because there was a request from the schools, parents, and students to educate the district on the Hmong culture as well as to educate parents and students about literacy, college, and careers. The event started out with a planning committee who was passionate about educating the Hmong community about literacy and college and also passionate about helping non-Hmong educators understand the Hmong cultures. From there we secured grants and in-kind donations as well as people to talk about these various subjects. After that we invited the families and community. Phone calls, flyers, and emails were our biggest means of getting the word out about the event. The event was held at West High School on April 29<sup>th</sup>. As the event started people poured in to learn, eat authentic Hmong food, and share their thoughts, stories, and concerns. This event served low-income, Hmong families from the Green Bay area as well as non-Hmong school staff from the Green Bay School District. When parents are aware of educational opportunities they are able to support and help their children get the education they need. When non-Hmong staff are aware of others cultures it helps them understand how they can better serve a family.

**VISTA:** *Erica Spurgeon*

**Site:** *Grove Elementary School*

**Partnership Practice:** *World Café Parent Meeting*

Our school is considered a high poverty school with over 50% on the free or reduced lunch program. It is understood that in order to better equip our students here, we need to build a strong partnership with the parents/families. We all must unite to give each student the best possible academic outcome. As a VISTA, I attended a conference where this practice was touched upon as a possibility to engage parents and families. I started to research and found that a lot of people, including other school had not heard about this tool. We then modified it slightly to fit

our environment and goals. Everyone in attendance played an important part. That is the brilliance of the “World Café” model. I also had a short period in the beginning to use as an informational session where our Reading Specialist and Principal spoke regarding our new School-Wide Title I Plans, and how all in attendance would also play a significant role in helping with that. This was an event held February 23, 2010 at Grove Elementary, in which parents and staff joined together in a “conversation that mattered”, using the “World Café” model for guidance. This model includes periodic table rotations, while pondering important questions, to engage on the collective wisdom of the group. It was (hopefully) the start of many more “conversations” to come as we plan on having more “World Café” events, in order to include our parents in decision making. Grove Elementary is working on family involvement. We have wanted to give our parents/families a stronger relationship with our school. We are hoping to meet their needs, address concerns and honor suggestions. We understand that our parents/families are HUGE stakeholders here and want to build and improve our relationship.

**VISTA:** *Nicole Stachurski*

**Site:** *Washington Elementary School*

**Partnership Practice:** *Summer Opportunities and Volunteer Appreciation Family Night*

Washington Elementary School held the first annual Summer Opportunities and Volunteer Appreciation Family Night this year. We invited several community organizations, (Oshkosh YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, Oshkosh Public Library, Apple Blossom Books, Summer School and Recreation Department) to present the opportunities they offer during the summer. They presented in the school’s gymnasium where we also thanked all the school’s volunteers and presented them with a certificate and a small gift. While the parents were gaining information about summer activities, students participated in summer safety presentations with the Oshkosh Police Department and the Oshkosh Fire Department. The goal of this practice was to offer in one place, several summer educational and recreational opportunities to our students and their families and to publicly thank all the volunteers who help to deliver services and make our school a welcoming place. This event supported our school improvement goal of improved academic achievement in literacy as our public library presented their summer reading program, the district presented literacy classes offered through summer school, and a local bookstore presented children’s summer book clubs. Our action team implemented this practice because we realize the importance of summer activities in our student’s lives and their limited exposure to extracurricular activities. Research conducted by Robert Marzano indicates that children who do not read over the summer regress in their reading skills. We also understand that, though not the most important aspect of volunteering, recognition of volunteers is a good way to encourage people to volunteer their time to a cause.

**VISTA:** *Tracy Steffens*

**Site:** *WI Educational Opportunity Program*

**Partnership Practice:** *The School Empowerment and Family (SAFE) Program*

In partnership with Sherman Middle School, DPI’s GEAR UP organized an eight-week series of family meetings. Ten families that had 6<sup>th</sup> grade students attending Sherman were chosen to participate. Each meeting included a meal, an icebreaker or community building activity, breakout sessions for both the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students and their parents, one-on-one time for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade student and

their parents, family game time and a drawing for prizes. The specific goals of this activity were to facilitate communication between students and their parents, to inform parents of the many resources available to them in the school and community, to foster a sense of community for students their families within the school and DPI's GEAR UP program. This practice was added to GEAR UP's program of partnerships for several reasons. One use was to assist with GEAR UP's recruitment of student and parent participants. The hope is that by helping develop student leaders in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, that these students will take advantage of what GEAR UP offers and encourage other students to be involved as well. The same goes for their parents, who may also be involved with the program's Parent Advisory Board. GEAR UP administrators also believe that empowering parents to be involved in their children's education will assist with GEAR UP's mission to improve the achievement gap at Sherman Middle School, one of the program's target schools.

**VISTA:** *Brittany Williams*

**Site:** *Madison Metropolitan School District*

**Partnership Practice:** *Family and Community Involvement Monthly Newsletter*

Establishing buy-in from teachers and district staff has always been one of the biggest challenges to sustainable, equitable family involvement. After discussions with our supervisor, our VISTA team decided that a newsletter highlighting family and community involvement strategies and successes would be an excellent resource for district personnel. We thought that a monthly newsletter, distributed during the school year, would be an informative and informal way to encourage district staff and teachers to embrace family and community involvement. By being candid, and highlighting the risks and rewards of engaging families and communities, we wanted to open a positive line of communication with district staff. From that premise, Becky, Ellen, and I brainstormed ideas for content and a simple template. I made a mock-up of the first month's newsletter, then our team got together to review the content and refine the look and flow of the information. We included local and national examples in the first issue, as well as an article on the, sometimes tenuous, relationship between teachers and parents. Once we had established our basic structure and content, we divided up the workload for producing newsletters for the 2010-11 school year. So, in many ways this practice is a practice in progress, but we have high hopes for its ability to inspire positive change in the ways our district personnel approach family and community involvement. This practice helps district personnel think about and gives them resources to pursue new parent and community involvement strategies. Our goals are to emphasize the importance of family and community involvement, to provide district personnel with resources and ideas that stimulate family and community involvement, and to provide information and resources in a new, interesting, and unobtrusive way district-wide.

**VISTA:** *Dustin Young*